

# Publishing Administrative Histories

Dwight T. Pitcaithley

**A**dministrative histories of National Park Service areas have become quite popular over the last decade or so. They are being prepared not only by Park Service historians but by academic historians, other researchers, and consultants. As Alston Chase's *Playing God in Yellowstone* has demonstrated, park histories can even draw the attention of major commercial presses and become part of national debates. The 1991 edition of the History Division's *National Park Service Administrative History: A Guide* lists 179 studies representing approximately 133 park units. Several observations from this list of completed histories may be useful in determining the direction of future administrative histories.

First, management histories of national park areas seem to be welcomed by history journals and academic presses. Presses at the universities of Tennessee, California, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Kansas have all published histories of the founding and management of national park system areas. Likewise, portions of larger studies can be found in quarterlies across the country. The *Utah Historical Quarterly*, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, *The Pacific Historian*, and *Upper Midwest History* found histories of individual parks worth publishing.

Second, the number of studies published by academic presses and historical quarterlies is remarkably small. Only 12% of the 179 entries resulted in publication by these traditional outlets. The bulk of the histories, 75%, were printed in small quantities by the Park Service or Government Printing Office contractors. (Another 24 or so have been published by cooperating associations, vanity presses, and popular presses.)

Third, practically none of the studies prepared by Park Service historians have been published by any academic, public, or private press or historical quarterly. Indeed, fewer than 5% have been published by any entity other than the government.

While one should be hesitant to draw any firm conclusions from this very cursory examination of the administrative history guide, Park Service historians are running the risk of becoming estranged from the mainstream of historical scholarship by avoiding the traditional scholarly publishing avenues with their built-in peer review system. To the degree this occurs, their research and writing will fail to be illuminated by relevant work being pursued elsewhere in the profession, and the usefulness of their histories will suffer.

George Mazuzan, historian for the National Science Foundation, wrote recently that federal historians should insist that the same standards for scholarship set by academic historians be used everywhere. These standards are worthwhile because they improve research reports and ultimately ensure that federal histories receive the scholarly credit they deserve. (General professional standards

for public historians have been conveniently compiled in *Ethics and Public History: An Anthology*, edited by Theodore Karamanski and published in 1990 by Krieger Publishing Company, Malabar, FL.)

Professional standards require that historians, federal and academic alike, (1) are thorough in their research, (2) are objective in their analysis, (3) submit their work to widespread critical peer review, and (4) seek to have it published in "journals and by presses that give it the imprimatur of scholarship."<sup>1</sup> While NPS historians may be addressing the first two, the administrative history guide indicates that peer review and publication in journals and by presses that are "refereed" are not a part of the NPS history program.

The publication process is critical to the professional health of federal historians because it provides a forum for critical peer review and alerts the broader historical community to the fact that they are conducting solid research and writing. The current *NPS Management Policies* encourages the publication of research products although it makes no specific reference to peer review. It should be argued by all those within the bureau doing serious historical research that outside publication is an intrinsic element of the Service's research program. Scientists in the Service assume that their research results will be published for the findings to be credible. Certainly those who are a part of the research grade evaluation process must publish and otherwise participate in professional activities to maintain their positions or gain promotions.

One final observation from the administrative history guide is that research done under contract is much more likely to be published than research conducted by NPS historians. The Service has, over the years, contracted for a wide variety of research ranging from cultural resource inventories to historic resource studies to administrative histories. While the results have varied, this writer has found the contracting process an excellent way of obtaining quality work.

The advantages of contracting for historical research are several. First, the contracting process allows the Park Service greater flexibility in locating historians who specialize in the subject needing study. They can then begin the work without extensive background research. Second, the contracting office pays for work only as it is completed. Contractors understand that if the chapter or unit of the product is not satisfactory, payment can be withheld. As a result, they are generally quite willing to please. Third, contractors understand that their reputation is only as good as their last piece of work. To enhance their professional reputations as well as support the discipline's standards, contractors generally are eager to seek publication beyond that required by the Park Service. The North Atlantic Region, for example, has contracted for historical research that has ultimately been published by the Johns Hopkins and Rutgers university presses. It is currently managing a contract for an administrative history of Salem Maritime National Historic Site that will in all likelihood be published through an academic press.

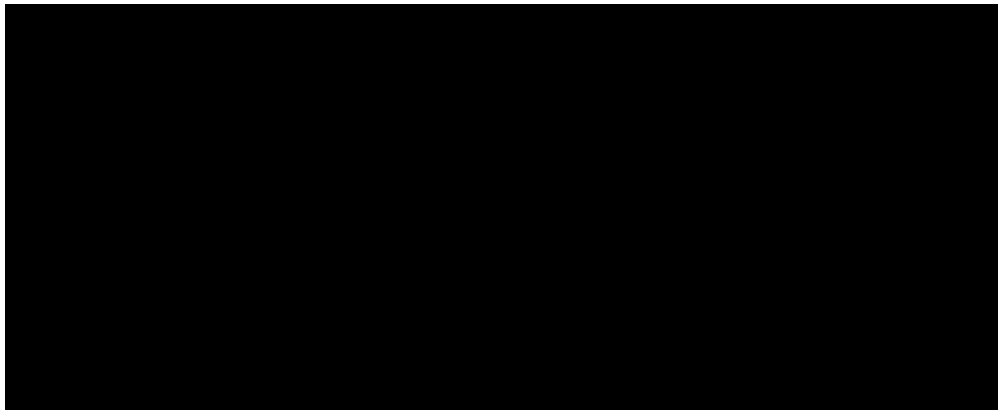
The publication of Park Service research, whether by contractors or the bureau's own historians, is simply

(Publishing—continued on page 16)

**(Institutional Memory**—continued from page 15)

the others close by guided the trips. The fee was ten dollars per day for the guide and five dollars for each horse. The animals they used were big and strong, one observer recalled, and the trips had real appeal for visitors.

The [1962 memorandum of agreement with the Navajo Nation] formalized the outfitting process at the monument, requiring more than a verbal agreement and possibly precipitating a change in the vendor. One summer in the early 1960s, Pipeline Begishie decided that the horse trips were more trouble than they were worth. Some accounts suggest that one of Begishie's neighbors, E. K. Austin, bullied him into a cessation of his activity. Into this vacuum stepped Austin, who claimed the land through which the trips had to pass on the way to Tsegi Point and Keet Seel as his own. Much of the exchange between Begishie and Austin occurred without the knowledge of park personnel. Yet Austin stepped forward and claimed the right to offer services to Keet Seel. In exchange for the right of passage across Navajo lands, the Park Service agreed to let the Austin family offer guided horse trips to the outlying section.



View of Hubbell Trading Post site. Photo by G. Ben Witticks.

E. K. Austin related a different version of the transfer. He claimed to have taken pack trips to the ruins since the days of John Wetherill. In his view, Begishie was an interloper, crossing on Austin's land. The monument was located in the district of the Shonto Chapter, but Austin was enrolled in the Kayenta Chapter. He believed this accounted for Begishie's presence. The disagreement became serious in the early 1960s, and both Art White and his successor Jack Williams tried to mediate. They were unsuccessful, and both Austin and Begishie were called to Window Rock. There, Austin claimed, he was vindicated and offered the service that was rightly his.

Austin's privilege to offer horse trips was not exclusive, although he worked to make it a monopoly. As late as 1966, Jack Williams noted that Begishie's permit to carry people to Keet Seel was valid, but he would not do so as long as the Austins did. The transfer may have been done by force or by intimidation, but the result was the same. E. K. Austin had control of the horse trips to Keet Seel.

The Austin family conducts these trips to this day.

The permanent Institutional Memory is the well-written administrative history. Besides being important historically, it can be fun to read. I invite anyone to catch the spirits of the wind and water, the blue sky and red rock, and the spirits of people's past captured in the unorthodox administrative histories of the southwest parks and monuments. I guarantee a few smiles and a collection of chuckles. Ah, the grandeur of place and the merriment of life—what a legacy!

John Cook is regional director of the NPS Southwest Region.

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**(Publishing**—continued from page 13)

good business. It enhances the credibility of the Service's historical research program, and it announces to a wide audience that the bureau has a strong research program that maintains the highest standards of the profession. And finally, by embracing an activist stance toward peer review and publishing, NPS historians can minimize the potential of being labeled mere public relations agents for a government agency manufacturing its own version of history. (In his 1992 book *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, John Bodnar criticizes the Service for its promotion of a "public memory that served the cause of a powerful nation-state.")

The Park Service should take immediate steps to institutionalize the profession's standards and to require that all research reports be subjected to the peer review process. In addition, those same standards should

require that all or a portion of every serious piece of research be published in a quarterly or press that employs the peer review process. There is a great deal of excellent scholarship being accomplished within the NPS. The producers of that work have the right to demonstrate that their work meets the academy's test of scholarship and is good enough to be added to the historical literature of the subject under consideration. Historical research worth pursuing is worth exposing to the widest possible review and readership.

Dwight Pitcaithley is chief of the Cultural Resource Services Division in the NPS National Capital Regional Office.

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<sup>1</sup> George T. Mazuzen, "Government-Sponsored Research: A Sanitized Past?" *The Public Historian* 10 (Summer 1988): 35-40.